Kakinada Canal, Eluru Canal, Commamur Canal and Buckingham Canal.

(ii) Geonkhali-Charbatia Stretch of East Coast Canal (ECC) alongwith Charbatia-Dhamra stretch of matai river, Talcher-Dhamra stretch of River Brahmani and Mangalgadi—Paradip stretch of Mahanadi delta river.

(iii) Karimganj-Lakhipur stretch of river Barak.

Improving of cruise shipping

2624. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether cruise shipping in India is in a poor state as compared to its status in countries in Caribbean, Latin America and South East Asia;

(b) the present strength of cruise ship both in the public and private sectors in the country with passenger capacity in each sector; and

(c) the specific steps proposed by Government to appreciably improve the position of cruise shipping in India by the turn of this decade?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Cruise Shipping is in a nascent stage in India.

(b) There is no cruise ship under Indian flag at present.

(c) The following steps have been taken and are being taken to improve the position of cruise shipping in India:—

(i) A High Power Steering Group has been set up with a view to catalyze the growth and development of cruise shipping in India.

(ii) Cabotage has been relaxed for cruise ships for a period of 5 years from December, 2003.

(iii) Upto 50% rebate has been given in vessel related charges including berth hire, pilotage, etc.

(iv) Mumbai, Mormugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Tuticorin and Chennai Ports are being projected as part of the Indian cruise circuit.

(v) Systems and procedures are being streamlined to facilitate seamless travel of the tourists.

(vi) Cruise operator M/s. Ocean Cruises India Pvt. Ltd. has been permitted to operate cruises from Goa to Lakshadweep *via* Cochin. Similarly Cruise operator M/s Star Cruises has been permitted to operate cruises from Mumbai to Lakshadweep (Kadmat Island), and Mumbai to Goa.

Acquisition of ships by SCI

2625. SHRI B.J.PANDA: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that Government propose to give block approval to the Shipping Corporation of India for acquisition of vessels;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) how far this would help the Corporation to address the problems of ship acquisition?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) The Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) has submitted a block proposal for acquisition of 10 ships, viz,4. Aframax Tankers, 4 Panamax Bulk Carriers and 2 Cellular Container vessels to the Government. This would entail a total investment of about Rs. 2340 crores.

(c) The extent procedure for acquistion of ships includes processing of proposal by various agencies. Hence, the vessels acquisition under the block proposal is expected to expedite the process of acquisition of ships by SCI in view of the limited powers delegated to the SCI Board in approving capital investments decisions.

Conversion of Highways into National Highways in UP

†2626. SHRI NAND KISHORE YADAV: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the State Government of Uttar Pradesh have sent any proposal to convert some State Highways into National Highways;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.